

P 261252Z SEP 94
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8062
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
USIA WASHDC 3081
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 006796

DEPT FOR SA/PAB; LONDON FOR TUELLER

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: VIOLENCE ERUPTS DURING HASINA'S "TRAIN MARCH;"
AWAMI LEAGUE ALLEGES ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

REF: DHAKA 6682

11. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

12. SUMMARY: THE OPPOSITION AWAMI LEAGUE ALLEGES THAT ITS LEADER SHEIKH HASINA WAS TARGET OF AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT SEP 23 DURING A "WHISTLESTOP" RAIL TOUR OF WESTERN BANGLADESH. ALTHOUGH GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION SUPPORTERS CLASHED, WE HAVE SO FAR SEEN NO EVIDENCE THAT AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT TOOK PLACE. END SUMMARY.

13. CLASHES BETWEEN RULING BANGLADESH NATIONALIST PARTY (BNP) AND OPPOSITION AWAMI LEAGUE SUPPORTERS BROKE OUT AT THE ISHURDI AND NATORE TRAIN STATIONS IN WESTERN BANGLADESH SEPTEMBER 23, COINCIDING WITH STOPS BY AWAMI LEAGUE (AL) CHIEF AND LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION SHEIKH HASINA. HASINA HAS BEEN ON A PROLONGED "WHISTLESTOP" TOUR--A "TRAIN MARCH"--OF THE REGION TO DRUM UP SUPPORT FOR THE OPPOSITION'S SEPTEMBER 27 RAIL AND HIGHWAY BLOCKADE AND ITS DEMAND FOR A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT TO OVERSEE THE COUNTRY'S NEXT GENERAL ELECTION.

14. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, BNP PARTISANS ARMED WITH BLUNT WEAPONS AND HOMEMADE FIRECRACKERS ATTACKED AL SUPPORTERS PROCEEDING TO THE ISHURDI STATION. POLICE OPENED FIRE AT ONE POINT TO BRING THE SITUATION UNDER CONTROL. REPORTS ALSO QUOTED WITNESSES WHO SAID HASINA'S RAIL CAR WAS FIRED UPON AS IT PULLED INTO THE NATORE STATION. FIRECRACKERS WERE TOSSED AS HASINA ADDRESSED CROWDS FROM HER COMPARTMENT. THE CLASHES LEFT BETWEEN 60-100 INJURED, NONE CRITICALLY.

15. AWAMI LEAGUE STALWARTS BLAMED THE VIOLENCE ON THE BNP GOVERNMENT. AWAMI LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS SECRETARY KAISER CHOWDHURY CALLED POLOFF SEPTEMBER 23 TO SAY THAT "THE LEADER HAS BEEN FIRED UPON." AL DEPUTY LEADER ABDUS SAMAD AZAD TOLD REPORTERS THAT "BNP TERRORISTS" HAD LAUNCHED A PLANNED ATTACK AGAINST HASINA AND CREATED A "REIGN OF TERROR" AT ISHURDI AND NATORE. AWAMI LEAGUE SECRETARY GENERAL ZILLUR RAHMAN DECRIED THE "ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT," WHICH HE SAID WAS "MASTERMINDED BY THE HIGHEST QUARTERS OF THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION." HASIA VOWED THAT NO ATTACK WOULD DETER THE MOVEMENT FO CARETAKER GOVERNMENT, AND THAT SHE STOOD READY O "GIVE MY OWN BLOOD."

16. THE GOVERNMENT, FO ITS PART, ISSUED A PRESS NOTE SEPTEMBER 24 STATNG A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION HAD FOUND NO TRUTHIN THE ALLEGATIN THAT HASINA'S TRAIN WAS SHOT A. IN REALITY, READ THE NOTE, HASINA ADDRESSED COWDS AT WAYSIDE STATIONS IN A PEACEFUL ATMOSPHERE, AND SUFFICIENT POLICE WERE MOBILIZED FOR HER SAFETY. "UNRULY SUPPORTERS" OF OPPOSING POLITICAL PARTIES WERE PRESENT IN NATORE AND ISHURDI, THROWING FIRECRACKERS, BUT POLICE RESTORED ORDER QUICKLY. A FRONT-PAGE EDITORIAL IN THE PRO-BNP ENGLISH DAILY "NEW NATION" SARCASTICALLY POINTED OUT THAT THIS WAS NOT THE FIRST TIME HASINA HAD TRIED TO DRAMATIZE FOR POLITICAL GAIN

ALLEGED ATTEMPTS ON HER LIFE.

17. THE AWAMI LEAGUE HAS NOT PRESSED THE GOVERNMENT FOR A FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATION OF THE INCIDENTS AT ISHURDI AND NATORE, ALTHOUGH TOP AWAMI LEAGUE ADVISOR KIBRIA FAXED THE AMBASSADOR EXPRESSING "DEEP CONCERN ABOUT THE ATTACK ON THE LIFE OF SHEIKH HASINA." ACCORDING TO KIBRIA, "THE GRAVE IMPLICATIONS OF THE TERROR CAMPAIGN BY THE GOVERNMENT PARTY" WILL BECOME CLEAR WHEN ALL THE FACTS ARE OUT. KIBRIA DID NOT SPECIFY WHEN THIS MIGHT HAPPEN.

COMMENT

18. WE HAVE LITTLE FACTUAL BASIS TO SORT OUT CONFLICTING CLAIMS AND DETERMINE WHETHER HASINA WAS THE TARGET OF AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT. (WE WILL REPORT ANY SIGNIFICANT NEW INFORMATION.) HOWEVER, CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT THE CLASHES WERE NOT PART OF A PREMEDITATED ATTEMPT ON HER LIFE. THE MOST BELIEVABLE ACCOUNTS WE HAVE HEARD BLAME THE VIOLENCE ON STATE MINISTER FAZLUR RAHMAN, WHO HAILS FROM NEAR NATORE AND WHOSE OWN BNP RALLY THERE WAS DISRUPTED BY OPPOSITION AWAMI LEAGUE SUPPORTERS A FEW WEEKS EARLIER. RAHMAN ALLEGEDLY HELD A GRUDGE AND SENT OUT SOME OF HIS "BOYS" TO BREAK UP HASINA'S RALLY. OTHER REPORTS SUGGEST THE AWAMI LEAGUE KNEW IT WOULD FACE BNP DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE REGION BEFORE THE TRAIN SET OUT THE MORNING OF THE 23RD. IN ADDITION, ALL ACCOUNTS AGREE THAT HASINA COMPLETED HER SPEECHES AT ISHURDI AND NATORE AND DID NOT FLEE OR SEEK COVER DESPITE THE ALLEGED SHOTS AT HER TRAIN. WHAT IS CERTAIN IS THAT THE AWAMI LEAGUE HAS SOUGHT TO WHIP UP POPULAR INDIGNATION OVER THE INCIDENTS AND WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE ITS PUBLIC DENUNCIATIONS OF GOVERNMENT "TERRORISM."

MERRILL